

Devotional Studies No. 17

Commemorative Institutions

Christians observe three commemorative institutions—Sunday, Lord’s Supper, and baptism—which institutions are associated with the acts of God in historical events. These commemorative institutions are not arbitrary symbols. They represent actual events in history. In the observance of these three institutions, the Christian community testifies to Christianity as a historical religion. Christianity is tied to history. These three institutions are symbolical in nature and attest to the divine origin of Christianity. Commemorative institutions are not new to the Christian era. Just a perusal of the Old Testament reveals that God ordained various rituals as commemorative institutions in order to testify to historical events within the nation of Israel. Rituals confirm the validity of the divine nature of the Jewish religion. In the same way, the three commemorative institutions prove the authenticity of Christianity. God ordained certain rituals as reminders of historical events as well as of events to come. Some commemorative institutions in the Old Testament were also prophetic in that they foretold of the coming of the Messiah.

Memorial institutions in the Old Testament were of a twofold operation; that is to say, they were designed for ones living at the time of the historical events and for future generations, which rites continued to testify to the historical events. A classic example is the Jewish Passover instituted by God to commemorate Israel’s departure from Egypt. God informed Moses that He would strike down the firstborn of all living (**Exodus 12:12**). In order to avoid this plague, God told Moses to inform the families of Israel to kill a lamb and place some of its blood “on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses” (**12:7**). God then told Moses: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (**12:13**). Moses then addresses the necessity of continuing to observe this Passover as a memorial of this historical event: “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance” (**12:14**). Later, after they entered the land of Canaan, they were told: “And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Pasover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians’” (**14:27**).

Another commemorative institution God ordained for the Israelites concerned their living in tents. This commemorative event is found in the Feast of Tabernacles (**Leviticus 23:33-43**). They are told to celebrate this institution “for seven days each year” (**23:41a**) and to keep this feast as “a lasting ordinance for the generations to come” (**23:41b**). God did not want them to forget this historical event: “All native-born

Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt (23:42). The two commemorative institutions, as well as many others, were designed to preserve and conduct forward the miraculous evidences of their origin and their religion, which produces faith in future generations. Even today, Jews still commemorate these institutions, which observances continue to testify to the historical accuracy of the events.

If the actions had not happened, it is difficult to believe that the commemorative institutions could have been inaugurated. For instance, one should reflect upon a modern day commemorative institution to give validity to the above information, the Fourth of July celebration; this commemorative institution celebrates an historical event—declaration of independence (1776). If the event had not occurred, would this day still be celebrated as a national holiday? Could the Jews have been persuaded to adhere to the various commemorative institutions if the reasons assigned to them had never occurred, especially founded upon demonstrated facts?

God also ordained memorials associated with the Christian Church in order to perpetuate the historical accuracy of the events attested. Within Christianity, Christians still celebrate Sunday—a day commemorative of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. This day calls attention to the historical circumstances surrounding the Death of Christ. If this day had not occurred, one wonders how so many Jews were persuaded to accept this day over and above the Sabbath day. Sunday is a perpetual commemorative institution of the birth of immortal hope—a dawn of life beyond this life. This day attest to historic fact of His Death and Resurrection. Many witnesses witnessed his Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Observance of Sunday as a day of remembrance of the Christ has continued down to the present day, which day Christians continue to celebrate. Immediately following the Death and Resurrection of Christ, the commemorative day is instituted (within fifty days). Just a perusal of the New Testament writings indicates that God ordained two commemorative institutions to commemorate the historical events surrounding the sufferings of Christ upon Calvary: Lord's Supper and baptism.

Christianity is a story that runs from eternity to eternity. Peter speaks of Jesus as “chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20). Jesus told some Jews: “before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). At a particular point in time, God became flesh—He entered time (1:14). John later wrote: “That which was from the

beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched” (**1 John 1:1**). Peter, too, testifies: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (**2 Peter. 1:16**).

The Christian community of Jesus also gives credence to Christianity as a historical religion. The Church stands as a commemorative institution to the Christ of history. The Lord’s Supper, Christian baptism, and the Church exist as memorials of historical events that occurred in the historical past. What does “commemorative institutions” mean to you? The first day of the week has been continuous from the day of the Resurrection down to the present day. Many witnessed the Resurrection and the commemorative institution following the Resurrection known as Sunday, which takes place immediately and has been perpetuated down to the current day (2007). As stated above, there are three commemorative actions that give testimony to the validity of Christianity, namely, the Church, the Lord’s Supper, and Christian baptism. The Lord’s Supper occurred before the event actually occurred—His Death upon the Cross. It commemorates an event prior to its occurrence. On the other hand, baptism commemorates an event after its occurrence.

The Lord’s Day (Sunday) commemorates the time of the Resurrection; the Lord’s Supper commemorates His Death, Burial, Resurrection, and, at the same time, testifies to the coming of Christ in judgment upon the nation of Israel in AD 70; and baptism also commemorates His Death, Burial, and Resurrection. Baptism is also the one act that Christians share in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of the historical Christ. Baptism is a positive act of requirement from God. Baptism keeps the reality of Christ’s death standing forever, as

it were, before the eyes of men and women. Whenever one observes baptism, one cannot help but recall Christ crucified, pierced, wounded, dead, buried, resurrected from the dead, and ascended in His glory. These various memorials, or rituals, have helped to preserve the miraculous events found in Christianity down through the centuries. Every element of the various rituals operates as a commemoration of its Divine origin and produces faith in all future generations. The rituals were designed to stand for perpetual monuments to the nations of the miraculous nature of Christianity. Memorials provide living testimony to the credibility of the Christians faith.